

# SOME COMMON LATIN PHRASES



Extract from  
*Compendium of Good Writing*  
by N E Renton (Wiley Australia 2004) (expanded)

*Note:* Hyphens are not used in the 267 or so phrases shown below.  
The use of italics is optional.

**quidquid latine dictum sit altum viditur.** whatever is said in Latin seems profound.

*Girl, to amorous boy-friend: Go easy, I'm virgo intacta.*

*Boy: Oh, I can speak Latin, too. I'm infra dig.*

**a fortiori.** with yet stronger reason.

**a posse ad esse.** from possibility to actuality.

**a posteriori.** derived by reasoning from observed facts.

**a priori.** from what was before.

**ab incunablis.** from the origin.

**ab initio.** from the beginning.

**ab intra.** from within.

**ab urbe condita** (abbreviated **AUC**). from the founding of the city (Rome in 753 BC).

**ad absurdum.** to the point of absurdity.

**ad eundem.** to the same level.

**ad eundem gradum.** to the same level.

**ad hoc.** for this special purpose.

**ad hominem.** appealing to feelings rather than reason.

**ad idem.** of the same mind.

**ad infinitum.** without limit.

**ad libitum.** according to pleasure.

**ad litem.** for the suit.

**ad nauseam.** to a disgusting extent.

**ad valorem.** according to value.

**addenda.** things to be added.

**advocatus diaboli.** devil's advocate.

**affidavit.** a sworn written statement usable as evidence in court.

**agenda.** things to be done (used especially for a list of items to be discussed at a meeting).

**alea iacta est.** the die is cast (Caesar).

**alma mater.** one's old school or university.

**alter ego.** other self.

**amicus curiae.** friend of the court.

**amicus omnibus, amicus nemini.** a friend to all is a friend to none.

**anno domini** (abbreviated **AD**). in the year of the Lord.

**annus horribilis.** a terrible year.

**annus mirabilis.** a wonderful year.

**ante bellum.** before the war.

**ante meridiem** (abbreviated **a.m.**). before midday.

**aqua fortis.** nitric acid.

**aqua pura.** pure water.

**ars gratia artis.** art for art's sake.

**aude sapere.** dare know.

**bella gerant alii.** let others wage war.

**bona fide** (adjective). genuine, sincere.

**bona fide** (adverb). genuinely, sincerely.

**bona fides** (noun). honest intention.

**carpe diem.** seize the day.

**casus belli.** the circumstances justifying war.

**cave canem.** beware of the dog.

**caveat emptor.** let the buyer beware.

**caveat venditor.** let the seller beware.

**ceteris paribus.** other things being equal or unchanged.

**circa** (abbreviated **c.** and followed by a date). about.

**cogito, ergo sum.** I think, therefore I am (Descartes).

**compos mentis.** sane.

**confer** (abbreviated **cf.**). compare.

**cor unum.** one heart.

**corpus delicti.** the facts of a crime.

**corrigenda.** a list of things to be corrected (in a book).

**cui bono?** who benefits?

**cui malo?** who suffers a detriment?

**cum grano salis.** with a grain of salt (that is, not literally).

**curriculum vitae.** a summary of a person's career.

**de facto.** in fact (especially in contradistinction to "de jure").

**de gustibus non est disputandum.** there is no accounting for taste.

**de jure.** by right (especially in contradistinction to "de facto").

**de minimis.** with respect to trifles.

**de novo.** anew.

**delectatio morosa.** peevish delight.

**deo gratias.** thanks be to God.

**deo volente.** God willing.

**deus ex machina.** a contrived event that resolves a problem at the last moment.

**dictum meum pactum.** my word is my bond.

**dramatis personae.** the list of characters in a play.

**dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.** it is sweet and proper to die for one's country (Horace)

**dum spiro, spero.** as long as I breathe, I hope (Cicero).

**dura lex, sed lex.** the law is harsh, but it is the law.

**ecce homo.** behold the man.

**ego.** consciousness of one's own identity.

**eiusdem generis.** of the same kind.

**emeritus.** retired after distinguished service and holding an honorary title (for example, emeritus professor).

**ergo.** therefore.

**errata.** a list of errors (in a book).

**et alia.** and other things.

**et alii** (abbreviated **et al.**). and others.

**et cetera** (abbreviated **etc.**). and so on.

**et sequentes** (abbreviated **et seq.** or **seqq.**). and those that follow.

**et uxor** (abbreviated **et ux.**). and wife.

**ex cathedra.** (of a pronouncement) formally, with official authority.

**ex curia.** out of court.

**ex gratia.** purely as a favour.

**ex libris.** from the library of.

**ex nihilo.** out of nothing.

**ex officio.** by virtue of his office.

**ex parte.** by only one party to a dispute in the absence of the other.

**ex post facto.** retrospectively.

**excusatio non petita, accusatio manifesta.** he who excuses himself, accuses himself (qui s'excuse, s'accuse).

**exeat.** permission for a temporary absence.

**exempli gratia** (abbreviated **e.g.**). for example.

**fama nihil est celerius.** nothing is swifter than a rumour.

**fiat.** let it be done.

**floruit.** he flourished.

**functus officio.** having discharged his duty and thus ceased to have any authority over a matter.

**gaudeamus igitur.** so let us rejoice.

**habeas corpus.** you may have the body. (The opening words of a prerogative writ requiring a person holding another person to bring that person before a court.)

**hic jacet.** here lies.

**honoris causa.** as a mark of esteem.

**ibidem** (abbreviated **ibid.** in citations of books, etc.). in the same place.

**id est** (abbreviated **i.e.**). that is.

**idem.** the same.

**imperator.** emperor.

**imprimatur.** let it be printed.

**in absentia.** while absent.

**in camera.** in private session.

**in casu.** in this case.

**in casu extremae necessitatis.** in case of extreme necessity.

**in curia.** in court.

**in extenso.** at full length.

**in extremis.** near death.

**in flagrante delicto.** in the very act of committing an offence.

**in illo tempore.** at that time.

**in loco parentis.** in place of a parent.

**in media res.** in the midst of things.

**in memoriam.** in memory.

**in re.** in the matter of.

**in silico.** by means of a computer simulation.

**in situ.** in its original situation.

**in specie.** in kind; (a) in its own form and not in an equivalent (b) in coins and not in paper money.

**in toto.** entirely.

**in vino veritas.** in wine there is truth.

**in vitro.** observable in a glass test tube; outside the living body and in an artificial environment.

**in vivo.** happening within a living organism.

**index librorum prohibitorum.** official list of the books not to be read by Catholics.

**infra.** below or on a later page.

**infra dig.** unbecoming (slang).

**inter alia.** among other things.

**inter se.** among themselves.

**inter vivos.** during life.

**intra muros.** within the walls.

**intra vires.** within the power.

**ipso facto.** by that very fact.

**latine dictum.** spoken in Latin.

**loco citato** (abbreviated **loc. cit.**). in the passage just quoted.

**locum tenens.** one occupying the place (used as an English noun meaning "deputy").

**locus sigilli** (abbreviated **l.s.**). the place of the seal.

**locus standi.** the right to be heard in court.

**magna carta.** Great Charter (issued by King John in 1215, granting various liberties).

**magna cum laude.** with great honour or academic distinction.

**magnum opus.** great work.

**me judice.** I being the judge; in my opinion

**mea culpa.** by my fault (used as an acknowledgement of one's error).

**memento mori.** remember that you have to die.

**memorandum.** (a note of) a thing to be remembered.

**mens rea.** guilty mind.

**mens sana in corpore sano.** a sound mind in a sound body.

**mirabile dictu.** wonderful to relate.

**modus operandi.** the manner of working.

**multum in parvo.** much in a small compass.

**multus amicus, nullus amicus.** a friend to all is a friend to none.

**mutatis mutandis.** the necessary changes being made.

**ne plus ultra.** the highest standard of excellence.

**nemine contradicente** (abbreviated **nem. con.**). unanimously.

**nemine dissentiente** (abbreviated **nem. dis.**). unanimously.

**nihil obstat.** nothing stands in the way.

**nil desperandum.** there is no cause for despair (Horace).

**nisi.** unless.

**nolens volens.** whether one likes it or not; willing or unwilling.

**nolle prosequi.** to be unwilling to prosecute.

**non compos mentis.** insane.

**non sequitur.** it does not follow (used as an English noun meaning "a conclusion which does not accord with the premises").

**nota bene** (abbreviated **NB**). note well.

**numero pondere et mensura Deus omnia condidit.** God created everything by number, weight and measure (Isaac Newton).

**obiter dictum.** a saying by the way.

**omne ignotum pro magnifico est.** all things unknown seem grand (Tacitus the Elder).

**omnia mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.** all things are changing, and we are changing with them.

**omnia vincit amor, nos et cedamus amori.** love conquers all things, let us too yield to love (Virgil).

**opere citato** (abbreviated **op. cit.**). in the work just quoted.

**pari passu.** equally.

**passim.** in various places (in a quoted work).

**pax intrantibus.** peace to those who enter.

**pax vobiscum.** peace be with you.

**pedente lite.** pending the suit.

**per annum.** per year.

**per ardua ad alta.** through difficulties to the heights.

**per ardua ad astra.** through difficulties to the stars.

**per capita.** by the head.

**per centum.** per hundred.

**per diem.** per day.

**per mensem.** per month.

**per procurationem** (abbreviated **per pro** or **pp**). as agent for.

**per se.** taken alone.

**persona non grata.** a non-acceptable person.

**post hoc ergo propter hoc.** after this, therefore because of this (a logical fallacy).

**post meridiem** (abbreviated **p.m.**). after midday.

**post mortem.** after death (also figuratively).

**prima facie.** on a first view.

**primus inter pares.** first among equals.

**pro bono publico.** in the public good.

**pro bono.** done without charge in the public interest.

**pro forma.** for the sake of form.

**pro hac vice.** for this occasion.

**pro rata.** according to the rate.

**pro se.** on one's own behalf.

**pro tanto.** to that extent.



**pro tempore** (abbreviated **pro tem**). for the time being.

**proximo** (abbreviated **prox.**). of the next month.

**qua.** in the capacity of.

**quantum in me fuit.** I have done my best.

**quasi.** as if.

**qui desiderat pacem, praeparet bellum.** let him who desires peace prepare for war (Vegetius)

**quid pro quo.** something for something.

**quis custodiet ipsos custodes?** who is guarding the guards?

**quo in casu.** in which case.

**quo vadis?** where are you going?

**quod erat demonstrandum** (abbreviated **QED**). which was to be proved.

**quod erat faciendum** (abbreviated **QEF**). which was to be done.

**quod vide** (abbreviated **q.v.**). which see.

**ratio decidendi.** the reason for the decision.

**ratio legis est anima legis.** the reason of the law is the soul of the law.

**re.** in the matter of.

**reductio ad absurdum.** reduction to the absurd (proving the truth of a proposition by proving the falsity of all its alternatives).

**regina.** queen.

**requiescat in pace.** rest in peace.

**res ipsa loquitur.** the thing speaks for itself.

**res tantum valet quantum vendi potest.** a thing is worth only what someone else will pay for

**rex.** king.

**rigor mortis.** the stiffening of a body after death.

**salve** (plural **salvete**). hail; welcome.

**semel in anno licet insanire.** one can act the fool once a year.

**senatus populusque Romanus** (abbreviated **SPQR**). the Senate and the people of Rome.

**sensu stricto.** in a narrow or strict sense.

**seqq.** and those that follow.

**seriatim.** one after another in order.

**si vis pacem, para bellum.** if you want peace, prepare for war.

**sic.** thus.

**sic transit gloria mundi.** thus passes the glory of the world.

**silva rerum.** an assorted collection of facts.

**simpliciter.** naturally; without qualification.

**sine die.** without stipulating a day.

**sine qua non.** an indispensable condition.

**status quo.** the existing condition.

**stet.** let it stand (used in editing to indicate that something crossed out is to remain).

**sub judice.** before a court.

**sub rosa.** in confidence.

**sui generis.** of its own kind.

**supra.** above or on an earlier page.

**suum cuique.** to each his own.

**tempus fugit.** time flies.

**tempus fugit, mors venit.** time passes, death advances.

**terra firma.** dry land.

**terra incognita.** unknown land.

**terra nullius.** uninhabited land.

**timeo danaos et dona ferentes.** I fear the Greeks, even when they bring gifts (Virgil).

**uberrimae fidei.** of the utmost good faith.

**ultimo** (abbreviated **ult.**). of the previous month.

**ultra vires.** beyond the power.

**vade mecum.** a constant companion.

**vale** (plural **valet**). farewell.

**velle est posse.** where there is a will, there is a way.

**veni, vidi, vici.** I came, I saw, I conquered (Caesar).

**verbatim.** exactly as said.

**versus.** against.

**vi et armis.** by force and arms.

**vice.** in place of.

**vice versa.** the order being reversed.

**vide.** see.

**videlicet** (abbreviated **viz.**). namely.

**vires acquirit eundo.** we gather strength as we go (Virgil).

**virgo intacta.** virgin.

**volenti non fit injuria.** that to which a man consents cannot be considered an injury.

**vox populi.** voice of the people.



The Colosseum today

## POSTSCRIPT 1: BASTARDRY

*Several correspondents have asked about*

**illegitimis non carborundum.** don't let the bastards grind you down.

*This was the motto of United States General Joseph W "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell (1883-1946), but it is not real Latin. It is a pseudo-Latin joke.*

*A variation of this expression, **illegitimum non carborundum**, is the official motto of the Harvard University Marching Band.*





A warning in Pompeii

## POSTSCRIPT 2: DAN QUAYLE

*It is alleged that the former Vice-President of the United States, Dan Quayle, once said, "I was recently on a tour of Latin America, and the only regret I have was that I didn't study Latin harder in school so I could converse with those people."*

*However, good though it sounds, this is actually a made-up story.*

## POSTSCRIPT 3: PER PRO

### *per procurationem:*

If desired, letters can be signed by a subordinate on behalf of a superior in one of two ways:

(a) using Latin

**J M Smith**

pp **BKJ**

J M Smith, Sales Manager

where:

- the first "**J M Smith**" is an obviously fake manuscript signature of the superior
- "pp" stands for *per procurationem*, Latin for "through the agency of"
- "**BKJ**" are the manuscript initials of the person who physically signed the letter, whether or not that person also composed it
- the second "J M Smith" and the title are typed.

(b) using English

**Bruce Jones**

Bruce Jones

for

J M Smith, Sales Manager

where:

- the first "**Bruce Jones**" is the genuine manuscript signature of the subordinate
- the second "Bruce Jones" and the remaining lines are typed.

Signatures that take the form "Clerk pp Boss" are back-to-front and thus clearly wrong.

## POSTSCRIPT 4: THE CONQUEST OF SIND

*In 1843 Sir Charles Napier conquered Sind, which is now a province in Pakistan. He had had some misgivings about the justice of this action. He expressed these in the clever punning announcement of his success: "Peccavi" (I have sinned).*

## POSTSCRIPT 5: LOREM IPSUM

*"Lorem Ipsum" is the standard dummy text of the printing and typesetting industry. It is used to stop readers becoming distracted by the readable content of a page when looking at its layout.*

*Lorem Ipsum is a Latin passage which has a more-or-less normal distribution of letters, making look like readable English.*

## POSTSCRIPT 6: HOW SHOULD LATIN WORDS BE PRONOUNCED?

Nobody really knows how the Romans pronounced Latin words. For example, some experts prefer to sound a *c* as a *k*, while others prefer to sound a *c* as an *s*.

For a fuller discussion, see [the Wikipedia entry](#).

Some online dictionaries let users actually hear the sound of words.

## POSTSCRIPT 7: SEARCH ENGINE STATISTICS

Users who indicated which search engine they had used to find this site advised as follows:

	per cent
Google	76
Yahoo!	13
All others	11
Total	100



*A gentleman, having ordered a meal at a fine London restaurant, decided that he would like some wine to accompany his meal. So he summoned the wine steward and asked for a bottle of hock.*

*"Hock, sir?" asked the steward.*

*"Yes, hock, man. You know: hic, hunc, huius, huic, hoc."*

*"Hmm ... very good, sir."*

*The food duly arrived, but without the wine. This perturbed the gentleman slightly, as he was accustomed to a higher standard of service. He began to dine, and at the next opportunity he beckoned the steward again.*

*"Didn't I order a bottle of hock?"*

*"Yes, sir, you did - but then you declined it."*

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